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Breaking the Tradition

Describing the evil of murder, the Qur'an has this to say: "Whoever killed one human being,... should be looked upon as though he had killed all mankind; and whoever saved a human life should be regarded as though he had saved all mankind." (5:32) This has been expressly stated in the scripture because, when a man commits a crime of this nature, he breaks the tradition of respect for life. This tradition in society serves as a kind of psychological check against one man making a murderous assault on another. Once this check is removed, there is no barrier left in the way of indulging in such criminal activities. People become emboldened when such a precedent is set by a wrongdoer. That is how the murder of one man opens the door to more murders.

In order to understand the full implications of this point, let us take some examples from Muslim Spain. Towards the end of the Muslim rule in Spain, the Muslims, weakened by infighting had divided themselves into different states, which fell, one after the other. Later they established a kingdom in Granada under the rule of Sultan Naser bin Yousuf, better known as Ibn Al-Ahmar (It was this king who built the famous palace known as Al-Hamra palace in Granada). Now the most dreadful part of this history is that the third ruler of Granada was put to death by his brother, Nasir bin Muhammad in AH 710, as a matter of political rivalry. This killing broke the tradition of respect for life in the royal palace, throwing open the floodgates of murder in high places. Sultan Abdul Walid was subsequently killed by his own nephew in 725 Hijrah. Sultan Ahmad followed him to the throne, 'but was killed by a relative in AH 733. His successor, Sultan Yusuf, the ruler of Granada, was speared to death in AH 755. The next ruler, Sultan Isma'il was killed by his own brother in AH 761.

195:31

Patience: A Psychological Sacrifice

The majority of the Jews and Christians who were contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) rejected him outright. But there were some who did believe in him. Of them, the Qur'an has this to say: 'Those to whom We sent the Book before this believe in it. And when it is recited to them, they say: "We believe in it, for it is the truth from our Lord. We surrendered ourselves to Him long before it came." Twice will they be given their reward, because they have endured with fortitude.' (28:52-54)

According to the Qur'an, they were to be doubly rewarded, firstly, for believing in their own Book and, secondly, for believing in the Qur'an.

The level of faith shown by the People of the Book, (an important example of which was demonstrated by Abdullah ibn Salam, a Christian scholar who converted to Islam) can never be attained without patience and the sacrifice this involves. The Prophetic religion having become submerged in communal traditions they had to rise above the dictates of their community in order to prove that they were still the upholders of that religion. And that required patience. Again patience was required of them in their adoption of a new and strange religion – in fact the religion of another community – which bade them ignore all other interests and show disregard for expediency. It was due to this two-sided effort that they deserved a double reward.

The true faith can be received only when one is willing to rise himself above circumstances and risk the surveying of relations with one's community and the withdrawal of the community leaders' support. One who earnestly seeks to adopt the true faith must go deeper than appearances in order to attain reality; in short, he must ignore his own interests and instead adopt Islamic principles as his guide.

This is an extremely hard test. But the status of a true believer cannot be attained without making an extraordinary psychological sacrifice. Without this, one can neither find the truth, nor can one achieve great progress in faith.

199:10

Revolution in the Human Being

All the great conquerors in human history have nothing but political victories to their credit. They changed governments, but they failed to change human beings. All the successes in history are instances of a change of government, rather than a change brought about in human beings. In the Indian scenario, a 'Mahatma' apparently succeeded in bringing about a change in the system. Still, the Indian example is not very different either. The government changed hands in 1947. Foreign rule was replaced by home rule. But so far as human beings were concerned, no real change was effected.

This is the main reason why change in the government does not become synonymous with a change of circumstances. On the contrary, in most cases the new system ushered in the wake of the change in the government is worse than the previous one. As the saying goes: 'A revolution is a successful effort to get rid of a bad government and set up a worse.'

Throughout human history, the only exception to this rule is that of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. The revolution, brought about by the Prophet changed not only the government but also the human beings under it.

The basic reason for this difference can be traced to the difference between the method of the Prophet and that of the political leader, who always takes up political and economic issues. He achieves his goal by inciting people to rise against the ruler of the time. On the other hand, the Prophet takes up issues concerning the life Hereafter. He invites people to think critically of their own selves. While a leader launches his movement on the basis of arriving at a reckoning with others, the Prophet's movement is based on one's own self-appraisal. It is these different approaches which lead to different consequences in the two types of movements.

The Prophet's way and the experience of history show us that striving for the fall of a government is not a worthwhile goal. Change the human being and then the system of the government will change on its own.

195:9

Objection for Objection's Sake

At a symposium held in Ghalib Academy in New Delhi on December 6, 1992, on the subject: 'Religion does not teach communalism,' the writer in the course of his speech, made the point that according to God's scheme of creation, free competition is in the natural order of things. In a competitive set-up, there is bound to be friction, and, if this escalates, it can lead to confrontations between individuals and groups. This state of affairs, being quite natural, is unlikely to change. Given this situation, the only way to lead a peaceful life is to practise avoidance. That is to say, that whenever there is the fear of clashing in life's activities, the principle of avoidance should be put into practice. This will prevent any head on collisions and will ensure that human life develops in comparative safety.

You may have noticed playcards fixed in the streets at various points with the words: "Keep distance." It is by adhering to this part of the 'code of the road' that many vehicles can pass through the street at the same time without colliding with one another. It behooves all civic-minded citizens to adopt this same principle in their private and public lives as well as on the streets.

At question and answer time at the end of the speech, an educated Muslim got up and said, "The principle of 'keeping distance' suggested by you implies separate spheres for Hindus and Muslims and their having to conduct their lives in such a way that they have absolutely no connection with each other. With such a separation, our problems, far from being solved, would certainly escalate. (This shows how an insincere person can willfully misconstrue obvious and straightforward point.)

I replied that 'keeping distance' does not mean leading separate lives; it means rather the avoidance of confrontation in controversial situations. The signboard which admonishes drivers to 'keep distance' does not direct people to shut off their engines and bring their vehicles to a standstill on the street. It only means that while driving in heavy traffic, whenever there is any fear of a collision, they should take care not to drive too close to other vehicles.

Avoiding Anger

Abu Hurayrah tells of how a man came before the Prophet and asked him of some advice. "Do not be angry," said the Prophet. He asked for further advice, a second and a third time, and each time Prophet repeated the words, "Do not be angry."

195:11

Terrible Consequences

November 1992 saw Sandeep Lamba at the apex of his career. Born on September 3, 1965, he had been educated at Khalsa college, Delhi University, where he received his B.Sc. degree. Imbued with the spirit of adventure, he joined the defence service, where he distinguished himself in adventure sports, and rose to the rank of lieutenant.

Greatly interested in mountaineering, he collected a team of army men and began his ascent of the 67310 metre high Abi Gamin Peak in Garhwal on August 18, 1992, continuing to climb until he reached the summit. As reported by the *Hindustan Times* of November 20, 1992, "His end came at the summit itself, soon after he had stood there with a triumphant smile. The snow pack on the summit gave way and he fell to his death thousands of feet down below" (p. 12).

His life's journey had begun from his immediate sphere and then with a hard struggle he had managed to reach what was to be the zenith of his progress. At that very moment, the angel of death descended to snatch him away from the high point in his career, to cast him down to the nadir of lowliness.

The story of Lieutenant Lamba is not the story of just one individual. In actual fact, it is the story of every one of us. Only he who is obedient to God is exempt from such a tragic end. Only he who leads his life as commanded by God is destined to reach the pinnacle of success in the Life Hereafter.

(Taken from a news item, entitled 'Tragedy after the Triumph' published in the *Hindustan Times* of November 20, 1992).

195:32-33

Leaving with Grace

According to Abu Sa'eed Khudri (as recorded in the books of hadith), Abu Musa Ash'ari once came to meet 'Umar Farooq at his home during the latter's caliphate. Standing outside the gate, he called out: 'Assalam-u-'Alaikum, this is Abu Musa Ash'ari.' Getting no response, he repeated the greeting three times, but still no one came out, so he left.

'Umar Farooq was perhaps busy at that moment and could not, therefore, answer his call. Later on when he learnt of Abu Musa Ash'ari's departure, he called him and asked him why he had gone away. Abu Musa said he had heard the Prophet say that 'whenever one of you has asked permission thrice to enter anyone's house and still fails to receive permission, he should better leave.'

At this 'Umar Farooq asked him to bring witnesses to testify to this hadith's authenticity. Abu Musa Ash'ari asked Abu Sa'eed Al-Khudri about it. The latter replied that this hadith was known not only to himself but to many others besides, so the two immediately set off to reassure 'Umar on this point.

We learn from this tradition that if anyone intending to visit another is not admitted, he should not feel hurt by this. Taken in the true Islamic spirit, it should simply be attributed to some justifiable cause, and the visitor should depart without harbouring any rancour.

8 October 1994

To live, one must come to terms with dying

Abu Bakr, the first Caliph of Islam, once offered this piece of advice to a Muslim commander, by the name of Khalid ibn Walid:

“Khalid, be desirous of death. That way, you will find life.”

199:7

Being Grateful to God

Man must become not just God's servant but God's *grateful* servant, for gratitude is the bedrock of religion. Repeatedly enjoined in the scriptures, it is extolled as the secret of wisdom: 'We bestowed wisdom on Luqman: "Show gratitude to Allah. He that gives thanks has much to gain, but if anyone denies His favours, God is self-sufficient and glorious" (31: 12).

Everything touching man's existence is bestowed on him by God: his physique, his mental capabilities, the world's natural resources, the solar system, the universe – in short, from a minutest particle to the brightest star, all things are God's gifts.

Seeing this great multitude of blessings make us conscious of God's greatness, and overwhelms us with gratitude for the plenitude of His bounty, unable as we are to reproduce the necessities and comforts of life without divine intervention. So intense are these feelings of awe at God's magnanimity, that words of gratitude spring spontaneously to our lips. That is being truly thankful.

According to Abu Hurayrah, the Prophet once said: 'One who is not thankful to man cannot be thankful to God either.'

This *hadith* intended to make us understand what is meant by gratitude through an examination of our own feelings in a human situation. In that way, we can gauge our capacity for gratitude, we can know whether it exists or not.

That is to say that if man is grateful to man, it can safely be concluded that he will also be genuinely grateful to God. Conversely, the human ingrate will likewise be ungrateful to God.

195:7

What is the Cause?

The Olympics held in Barcelona (Spain) in July-August 1992 had the participation of 171 countries, out of which 64 countries won medals for their outstanding performance.

Despite the fact that India has a population of 86 crores, it could not win a single medal, neither gold, nor silver, nor bronze. Even in archery, an ancient Indian sport, others superseded India.

Of the list of 64 winner countries, the first ten were: CIS, USSR, Germany, China, Spain, Hungary, South Korea, Cuba, France and Australia.

For India, this is not an isolated event. Those who travel abroad or who keep an eye on the global situation know quite well that India does not exist at the international level. For instance, India simply does not figure in the list of industrial countries. In modern scientific research, India is not considered worthy of mention and its educational institutions, by modern standards, are looked upon as inferior.

What is the reason for this backwardness? It is traceable to a factor pointed out by a certain commentator:

“Men’s minds are lost in trivialities, and not attuned to the challenging issues of the time.”

Be it the case of the individual or the group, the reason for great success in this world is only one and that is to avoid trivialities and devote all one’s attention to whatever plays an effective part in making or marring the future. As Indians are unable to make this distinction, they cannot make any worthwhile progress, even after fifty years of clamorous struggle.

195:14

Acknowledgment and its Absence

The well-known English writer, G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936) once made the observation that “people generally quarrel, because they cannot argue.”

Whenever a discussion between two people on a controversial subject becomes heated, when one of the two starts raising his voice, or starts talking offensively to the other, this is a clear indication of his own sense of inadequacy in argument, and of his desire to compensate for this shortcoming with torments of words. Turning a conversation into a quarrel is proof of one's own weakness vis-à-vis the other party.

Argument is more powerful than anger just as a bomb is more powerful than a sword. One equipped with a more powerful weapon will never turn to a less powerful weapon. Similarly, one who has the strengths of skill in argument will never stoop to display anger to his rival. Sure of his ground, he will demonstrate confidence, while his opponent, standing on the shaky ground of fallacy, will display signs of irritation and lack of confidence.

Regardless of the topic under discussion, after there has been a certain amount of argument on both sides, it becomes clear at some stage that one viewpoint is correct, the other incorrect. Very often, instead of acknowledging the truth, the holders of the wrong viewpoint gives vent to a burst of anger. This is because he does not understand what greatness of spirit it shows to bow to the truth, while admitting that one was wrong. He is generally more concerned with loss of face than acceptance of the truth.

(211:4)

Patience, Impatience

Whenever one is faced with a problem, one may either accept the responsibility for it, or attempt to lay the blame on others. The first course results from patience, the second from impatience.

There can be no positive human psychology without patience. The patient man tries to understand the nature of the challenge confronting him, and then attempts to meet that challenge to the best of his ability. He channels all his time, energy and strength, as well as every particle of his resources into constructive action. Awakened by the shocks of an adverse situation, he makes a supreme effort to overcome all obstacles and to compensate for any previous failures. In this way, he emerges far more successful than ever before.

The behaviour of the impatient man – the result of negative thinking – is in direct contrast. He spends all his time complaining and protesting. Instead of putting all his resources into self-construction, he uses them in destructive activities directed against others. Instead of trying to make up for his own shortcomings, he throws himself into proving that others are in the wrong. If, prior to this, he was denied his due because of his own inaction, he now becomes the greater loser because of taking a wrong course of action.

Patience is a sine qua non for well thought out action; impatience can only give rise to thoughtlessness. Patience permits planned action, while impatience leads to acting in excessive haste. The patient man will attempt to solve problems only after making a proper assessment of the situation, and with a view to ultimate consequences. The impatient man will jump into the fray without any calculation whatsoever and – a prey to his own seething emotions – will remain blind to any adverse consequences. A very important aspect of the patient man is that he will take the trouble to acquaint himself with the standpoint of others, while the impatient man will consider only his own harrow claims.

Patience, therefore, is the wisest strategy. Impatience must at all costs be curbed, for it can lead only to misunderstandings, conflict and failure.

211:5

The Power of Prayer

During the caliphate of 'Umar Farooq, the second caliph, there was a clash between the Islamic and Persian empires. The Persian army was under the command of Rustam, of whom Ibn Khaldun, (1332-1406) the great Arab scholar, writes in his *Muqaddama* Thn Khaldun: "When Rustam saw Muslims assembling for prayer, he would say: 'Umar has caused a great upset. He is teaching those Arab dogs how to behave" (p. 152).

At that time, there being no mosques in Persia, the Muslim army used to say their prayers out in the open air. The men would assemble at the appointed times and, as a rule, one man would stand out in front in the capacity of a prayer leader, and all the rest would stand behind him in orderly rows. Rustam saw how these people, following the prayer leader, stood erect, bowed, and prostrated themselves in unison. He felt that by the order of the Islamic Caliph, not only were individuals being initiated with the rules of correct behaviour, but that the Muslim army as a whole was having discipline instilled into it. He knew how difficult it was to overpower a people who submitted to proper discipline and who acted according to a strict code of conduct.

The Muslims who observed the rites of prayer in 'Umar Faruq's time were far less in number than the present, worldwide throng of worshippers. Yet, the sight of worshippers \ in those early days of the first era would make people tremble, unlike today, when the sight of worshippers has no such revolutionary effect on observers.

The reason for this difference is that the worship performed by Muslims in the first phase of Islam as well as being a behavioural lesson, was a fresh, uplifting experience, whereas the prayers (*namaz*) said by today's Muslims are more akin to a soulless ritual. Today, people also stand in rows behind an Imam, but their obeisance is lifeless and empty. If the act of prayer for early Muslims was full of life and meaning, for the Muslims of today it is a hollow, routine charade. A ritual which is devoid of spirit can never be the equal of a living, meaningful act.

Towards a Non-violent World

Though the history of the non-violent movement is a very long one, historians concede that “the most massive and historically effective example of non-violent activism was that of the movement organized by Mahatma Gandhi” (13/850).

India can be justly proud that it was in this country, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, that for the first time in human history a non-violent movement culminated in such resounding success.

The first target for Mahatma Gandhi was to usher in peaceful political change throughout the country. This ambition was fulfilled in 1947. Mahatma Gandhi's second target was to bring about social change on the basis of non-violence. But before he could achieve his second target, he was tragically removed from the scene of action.

Now Our greatest need is to fulfill Mahatma Gandhi's mission. After political change we have to bring about social change in our country through Gandhi Andolan, that is, a nonviolent movement. If India could be successful on this front, it would undoubtedly find itself in a position to give the lead to the entire world.

There is only one way of exploiting the non-violent method for the reform of a society – and that is, to bring about a change in the thinking of the individual, who is the basic unit of society.

Someone has rightly observed that all violence is born in the mind and that it can be ended in the mind itself. For instance, during the second world war, Japan was burning to revenge itself on America. They said that America had devastated their town of Hiroshima, so they would devastate America. Although Japan's air force had been badly hit, its army was still intact, and its officers were bent on vengeance. At that juncture certain intellectuals in Japan pointed out that if America had destroyed their Hiroshima, they had already destroyed America's Pearl Harbour. In this way they were on a par. The score was even.

Due to this timely guidance, the Japanese came to rethink their position, and, abandoning the path of confrontation with America, and opting instead for the path of adjustment with it; in so doing, they were tremendously successful.

The truth is that intellectual awakening is the only way to produce a non-violent world. This is, without doubt, a long and laborious struggle. But we have no other alternative. I have myself been experimenting for the last 25 years in this field and my experience has been successful to a satisfactory extent.

After giving the matter a great deal of thought, I have come to the conclusion that, in most instances, violence is the result of misguided thinking. The day you succeed in putting an end to such thought, violence will of itself disappear.

Take the case, for example, of communal riots in India. In this matter I have done considerable work among the Muslims, having found that in most of the cases communal riots result from this erroneous way of thinking. I have always taken great pains to make them understand, for example, that when the processions are being led through the streets by other communities, the choice before them is not, as they imagine, either to tolerate the procession or to disrupt and stop it completely, but between tolerance of the procession and communal riots.

A procession is little more than a nuisance of a temporary nature. So one should simply bear with it so that riots resulting in human death and destruction do not ensue.

After December 6, 1992, surprisingly few communal riots have taken place. The credit for this goes to our mission. Had the people's minds not been prepared by our mission, terrible riots involving great numbers of people would have ensued subsequent to Dec. 6.

When there is violence, at whatever level and in whatever field, the basic question is at all events of the individual. And an individual is always governed by his thinking. That is why, if we have to make a non-violent world for a peaceful society, there is only one way, and that is by using educative method to convert people's thinking from violence to non-violence, and to enable them to seek the solution to matters of controversy through peaceful means. They must learn to understand the value of tolerance and avoidance as opposed to intolerance and confrontation. It is from such intellectual awareness alone that a non-violent world and a peaceful society can be constructed.

Prayer in Islam

Du'a (prayer) literally means to call. In Islamic terminology *du'a* means calling God, whether for worldly assistance or for salvation in the Hereafter.

Prayer has great significance in Islam. According to one of the *hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad said, 'It is prayer which is worship,' and 'Prayer is the essence of *'ibadah*.'¹ The reason prayer has such importance is that it is the ultimate expression of God's greatness and power and of man's helplessness. That is why a sincere prayer is the most precious of all deeds in the eyes of God.

1. A technical term in theology meaning acts of worship or ritual from the verb '*abada* "to serve" and '*abd* "slave", "servitor".

Prayer does not mean learning certain words by rote and then constantly repeating them. Although many prayers have been recorded in the books of Hadith, they are meant only to give us the substance of prayer, not its wording.

Prayer, in fact, is the expression of a distressed state of the heart. Such a state of the heart cannot be bound within certain set words of prayer. True prayer comes from the lips of a person when, on the one hand, he learns the full meaning of being a servant of God and, on the other, he discovers God in all His perfection. The words which come to his lips spontaneously with this two-sided realization are called prayer in the Islamic Shari'ah.

The concept of prayer in Islam and how to offer a true prayer is described in great detail in the Qur'an and Hadith. Here I should like to present some Qur'anic references.

1. Firstly prayer should be made to one God alone. The Qur'an says: 'Do not pray to anyone other than God, which can neither help nor harm you.' (10: 106) The Prophet Muhammad said: 'Whenever for anything you have to ask, ask it from God.' This is quite consistent with Islamic belief in monotheism. When Islam teaches mankind to believe in one God, with all power vested in Him alone, then praying to someone other than God can never be in accordance with Islam. That is why the Qur'an has this to say: 'His is the true prayer.' (13:14)

2. Prayer should always be marked by sincerity. The Qur'an says: 'Call to God, with sincere devotion to Him.' (40:14) When we conceive of God as being able to see one's heart, that prayer alone is of value wherein man's heart is fully in accord with his lips. A prayer which comes from one's lips alone is inconsistent with God's Majesty. Such a prayer certainly deserves to be rejected by God.

3. Prayer is the call of the helpless to the Almighty. It is therefore essential that it should be imbued with appropriate feelings. The Qur'an says: 'The faithful call on Us with piety, fear and submission.' (21:90)

The Qur'an further says: 'Call on your Lord with humility and in private.' (7:55) When the suppliant has a correct perception of God, his prayer will of necessity be imbued with such feelings.

4. God disapproves of man 'praying for evil as fervently as He prays for good.' (17:11) Praying for good is in accordance with man's humble position. True belief in God inculcates in man a temperament of sympathy and of kindness. One so inclined will always pray for good, he will never pray for evil.

5. According to a *hadith* the Prophet Muhammad said that God is best pleased when man prays to Him for peace (*Al-Tirmizi*). God likes peace. The Prophet frequently used to say this prayer: "O God! You are peace, and peace is from You. O God, help us to live with peace and reside in the home of peace, O Lord of Majesty and Glory." This invocation sums up the spirit of prayer.

6. Addressing the Prophet, God says in the Qur'an: 'When My servants question you about Me, tell them that I am near. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls to Me.' (2: 186) In Islam there is no intermediary between God and man. God is so near to man that He can always be called upon at any moment. According to Islam, the believers need neither an intermediary, nor any particular time or place to ask for anything from Him. Whenever he feels the need, and in whatever condition he may be, he can always establish contact with God.

I should like to sum this up by quoting a part of a sermon by Jesus Christ, relating to prayer. These words of Jesus Christ, to which Islam also subscribes, are the very essence of prayer:

Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks will receive, and anyone who seeks will find; and the door will be opened to him who knocks. Would any of you who are fathers give your son a stone when he asks for bread? Or would you give him a snake when he asks for a fish? Bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:7-11).

211:6

The Way of Wisdom

Although by political persuasion a colonialist, French statesman, Georges Bidault (1899-1983) had many wise sayings to his credit. Here is one of them: 'The weak have one weapon, the errors of those who think they are strong.'

Whenever an individual comes to think of himself as strong, he tends to overestimate his capabilities. And this can prove to be a weak point, for with his inflated self-confidence, he is likely to take steps whose consequences are beyond his control. In this way he becomes mired in difficulties of his own making.

This kind of weak point in the supposedly strong person becomes a weapon with which a weak person may always own himself. But if he is to gain full benefit from this, he must pursue a course of action which is characterised above all by patience. He must be judicious enough to keep a silent watch on the activities of his opponents. And then he must take practical steps only when they have sabotaged themselves by making a wrong move.

The battle of Khandaq, in 627 A.D., serves as one such example in the history of Islam. The Meccan opponents of the Prophet, overestimating their chances of victory, prepared a large army. Then, advancing on Medina, they held the city under siege. But this was a wrong move, considering, who their adversary was. The Prophet, very judiciously pursued a policy of avoidance by having a wide trench dug all around Medina, thus warding off the Meccan onslaught. Then instead of launching a counter-attack, he adopted a waiting policy, remaining within Medina.

This strategy proved extremely successful. All attempts to cross the trench failed. Dissension broke out among the attackers and then, with the added tribulation of a violent wind from the sea which blew for three days and nights, unleashing torrents of rain, they became discouraged and abandoned the siege.

Hijab In Islam

HIJAB IN THE LIGHT OF THE QUR'AN AND HADITH

This chapter is based on an authoritative Arabic book titled *Hijab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah*, by Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, a famous scholar and traditionist. It was translated by this writer and initially published in condensed form in the quarterly, *Islam and the Modern Age*.¹

1. *Islam and the Modern Age*, Urdu Edition (New Delhi), January, 1973.

The third edition of the original work with some additions is before me. The question of *hijab* (veil), or *purdah* in Urdu, the author tells us, has been discussed in the light of the Qur'an and Hadith.

From the author's point of view, a woman's face is not included in the parts of the body that need to be compulsorily covered. He suggests, however, that it is better to cover it. He agrees with those who, in spite of holding the view that the face is not to be covered as a rule, nevertheless advocate the covering of the face in order to discourage mischief, in view of the general moral degradation in present-day society. Here is one of the traditions referred to by him to support his argument.

'Aishah says that Muslim women used to attend the morning prayer led by the Prophet wrapped in a sheet of cloth. Afterwards, when they returned home, it was so dark that they could not be recognized.

This narrative makes it clear that their faces were not covered. Had their faces been covered, the question of their being recognized would not arise. The phrase "because of the darkness they could not be recognized" makes sense only if the faces, by which individuals are recognized, were uncovered.

Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani takes a similar stand as regards the covering of a woman's hands, quoting a famous tradition narrated by Ibn 'Abbas. It says that once the Messenger of God addressed the women to urge them to give alms (*sadaqah*). Afterwards Bilal ibn Rabah, a Companion of the Prophet, spread a sheet, on which the women began throwing their rings.

After quoting this tradition the author quotes Ibn Hazm:

Ibn 'Abbas saw the hands of women in the presence of the Prophet. This proves that the face as well as the hands are not included in the parts of the body to be covered. Indeed all other parts except these have to be veiled.²

2. Muhallmad Nasiruddin al-Albani, *Hijab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah* (1914), p. 31.

He further writes:

My heart bleeds to see the way many women of today adorn themselves, crossing all limits of decency. But the remedy does not lie in declaring forbidden what Allah has permitted.

He goes on to say that it is clear from the Qur'an, the Hadith and the practice of the Companions and *tabi'un* (companions of the Prophet's Companions) that, whenever a woman steps out of her home, it is incumbent upon her to cover herself completely so as not to show any part of her body except the face and the hands.³ According to Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani's findings the following rules of *hijab* are applicable:

3. Ibid., p. 7

1. The whole body, except for the exempted parts should be covered.
2. But any veil which in itself becomes an attraction is to be avoided.
3. Garments should not be semi-transparent.
4. Dress should not be tight fitting.
5. Garments should not be perfumed.
6. The form of dress should not in any way resemble that of men.
7. It should not resemble that of non-believers.
8. Garments should not reflect worldly honor.⁴

4. Ibid., p. 13.

The first rule of *hijab* has been derived from the following passages of the Qur'an:

Say to the believing women to turn their eyes away (from temptation) and to preserve their chastity; to cover their adornments except such as are normally displayed; to draw their veils over their bosoms and not to reveal their finery except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their step-sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women-servants, their slave girls, male attendants lacking in natural vigor, and children who have no knowledge of sex. And let them not stamp their feet when walking so as to reveal their hidden trinkets. Believers, turn to Allah together in repentance, that you may prosper.⁵

5. Qur'an, 24:31.

The second verse in this connection is as follows:

Prophet, enjoin your wives, your daughters and the wives of true believers to draw their veils close round them. That is more proper, so that they may be recognized (as virtuous women) and not molested. Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.⁶

6. Qur'an, 33:59.

The author interprets the wording of 33:59, "to cover their adornments except such as are normally displayed," to mean that the hands and face are exempt from covering. He draws his argument in support of this from the Hadith.

After studying many *ahadith* in connection with the verse from *surah* 33 of the Qur'an, he writes: "It is clear from the instances drawn from the Qur'an and the Hadith that, although it accords with the *shari'ah* and it is preferable for a woman to cover her face, it is not compulsory for her to do so. It would be better if women followed this practice, but there is no harm if they do not."⁷

7. Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, op. cit., p. 31.

The second rule of *hijab*, according to Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani's research, is that *hijab* in itself should not be a source of attraction. It should not become a display of finery referred to in the Qur'an as *tabarruj*:

Stay in your homes and do not display your finery as women used to do in the days of Jahiliyah (period before Islam). Attend to your prayers, give alms to the poor, and obey God and His Messenger. God only wishes to remove uncleanness from you (members of the family), and to purify you.⁸

8. Qur'an, 33:33.

According to the author, the intention of this verse is that a woman should not display her beauty and attraction in such a way as to produce carnal desires in the hearts of men. Since the purpose of the gown (*jilbab*) is to hide such attractions, it is, therefore, unimaginable that the gown itself should become a source of attraction.⁹

9. Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, op. cit., p. 31.

He states, moreover, that in Islam the displaying of feminine attractions is a habit so important to avoid that it has been bracketed in the scriptures along with such unlawful things as polytheism, adultery and theft. He has collected a number of *ahadith* to support his argument.

The third rule of the *hijab*, according to the writer, is that the garment should not be thin because a thin cloth can never provide cover. And a diaphanous garment only accentuates the attraction of a woman and becomes a potential source of mischief.¹⁰ The author quotes many sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, one of which is as follows:

10. Ibid., p. 56.

Towards the end (in the last phase) there will be women among my followers who will appear naked, or as good as naked, even when wearing clothes.

The fourth condition set by the writer is that the garment should be loose-fitting. He again supports his argument by quoting various sayings of the Prophet. Finally he has given an instance where Fatimah (the Prophet's daughter) expressed her disapproval of a dead woman being wrapped in such a shroud as might display her body as being a woman's. He writes: "See for yourself how the dearest daughter of the Prophet considered the use of such a cloth detestable as would not properly drape feminine parts of a dead woman's body. Certainly such a garment for a living woman would be far worse."¹¹

11. Ibid., p. 63.

The fifth condition of *hijab* is that the garment should not be perfumed (while going out). There are many traditions forbidding women to wear perfume while going out. After quoting four traditions, he writes: "Ibn Daqiq al-'Id writes that in this *hadith* a woman is forbidden to go to the mosque wearing perfume, because it stimulates carnal desires in men. So when it is forbidden for women wearing perfume to go to the mosque, their use of perfume when they go out shopping, or for any other purpose, is all the more sinful. Al-Haythami writes that going out wearing adornments and perfume is a major sin, even if it is done with the husband's permission."¹²

12. Ibid., p. 65.

The sixth condition of *hijab* is that a woman's garments should not resemble those of men. Here is one of the traditions he has quoted to this effect:

The Prophet has condemned men who imitate women and women who imitate men.¹³

13. Ibid., p. 67.

From this tradition the writer comes to the conclusion that a garment which in most parts resembles those of men is not permissible for women, even if it covers her adequately.¹⁴

14. Ibid., p. 77.

The seventh rule of *hijab* is that it should not resemble that worn by non-believers. Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani says that any similarity to non-believers must be avoided, in matters of worship, festivals and dress.¹⁵ The Qur'an states this briefly, but the *sunnah* provides the detail. One of the verses of the Qur'an on which he bases this argument states that It is "so that they may not be like those who were given the scriptures before this ..."¹⁶ He quotes Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathir who construe this verse as meaning that imitation of non-believers is not allowed in Islam.

15. Ibid., p. 78 .

16. Qur'an, 57:16.

Then he quotes the tradition in which the Prophet forbade adopting the ways of non-believers in prayers, funeral prayers, sacrifice, food, dress, etiquette, etc.¹⁷

17. Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, op. cit., p. 80.

The eighth rule of *hijab* is that a woman's garments should not reflect worldly honor. Here is a *hadith* to this effect:

One who wears the mantle of fame in this world will be made to wear the robe of dishonor in the hereafter.¹⁸

18. Ibid., p. 80.

His concluding remarks are: "The garment should cover the entire body of a woman except the face and hands, and should not become an attraction in itself. Neither should it be thin, nor tight. It should not accentuate the body. It should not be perfumed or resemble those worn by men or non-believing women. It should not suggest fame."¹⁹

19. Ibid., p. 110.

THE TRANSLATOR'S VIEWS

The Qur'an says: "Say to the believing women to turn their eyes away (from temptation) and to preserve their chastity; to cover their adornments except such as are normally displayed."²⁰

20. Qur'an, 24:31.

The wording of the verse, "except such as are normally displayed," gives rise to the question of what it is that has been exempted here from being covered. The theologians and the commentators have two views on the subject. These two views are based on the fact that beauty is of two kinds – one natural (by birth) and the other artificial (that is acquired by the use of make-up, etc.). One group says that the word 'beauty' here refers to both kinds of beauty, whereas the other group believes that it is artificial beauty which is referred to in this verse.

Ibn Mas'ud, Hasan, Ibn Sirin, and Abul Jawza' have interpreted this verse as referring to the kind of beauty which depends on clothes, ornaments, etc. They are of the opinion that when a woman goes out, she should not display these deliberately. However, if any part of such adornment is unintentionally exposed, for instance, if a gust of wind displaces the covering sheet momentarily, this is deemed excusable.

The other point of view finds support from 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas, 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar, 'Ata', 'Ikrimah, Sa'id ibn Jubayr, Abu ash-Sha'tha', Dahhak, Ibrahim Nakh'i, etc. They infer from the phrase "such as are normally displayed" the exemption of face and hands.

This interpretation is based on the tradition recorded by Abu Dawud in his *Sunan*: 'Aishah says that once Asma bint Abu Bakr came wearing a thin garment. The Prophet turned his face away from her and said: "Asma, it is not proper for a woman after having reached puberty to expose any part of her body except these." Then he pointed to his hands and face."²¹

21. Abu Dawud, *Sunan, Kitab al-Libas*, 4/62.

That is why there are two theological schools of thought. The Hanafis and Malikis believe that the face and hands are not to be covered, while the followers of Imam Shafi'i and Hanbali maintain that a woman has to be fully veiled. In this view, natural as well as acquired beauty have to be completely veiled. It is unlawful for a woman to unveil any part of her body when she goes out. To them, what is exempted is that which gets exposed unintentionally. They will be excused for that. Thus the face and the hands are the parts that are forbidden to be exposed unnecessarily.²²

22. Muhammad 'Ali as-Subuni, *Rawai' al-Bayan*, (Beirut, 1980), 2/155.

Maulana Shabbir Ahmad 'Usmani gives the following commentary pertaining to this verse of the Qur'an:

To this writer the interpretation of *zinah* (beauty) as adornment would be more appropriate and comprehensive in this context. The word adornment encompasses all kinds of beauty, whether natural or acquired; whether inborn beauty or that of beautiful garments or make-up. In short, a woman is forbidden to display adornment of any kind before anyone not permitted by the *shari'ah*. If a woman cannot keep these parts veiled as ordained for reasons beyond her control, or for any compelling reason, she cannot be held responsible for that (provided it is not likely to generate any mischief.)

It is evident from the Hadith and *athar* (the sayings and deeds of the Prophet's Companions) that the face and hands are exempt because it is not possible to keep them covered while performing various chores of daily life and even religious rites. If they are ordered to be strictly covered, it will create great difficulties for women in carrying out their jobs. The theologians have considered the feet also to be exempted parts. It must be clearly understood, however, that unveiling is permitted strictly on the basis of necessity. Men are forbidden to set their eyes on them. Perhaps this is why before exempting women from covering their face and hands (verse 31), men are commanded to lower their gaze and guard their modesty in verse 30. Thus the permission to unveil a part of the body does not give license to others to set their eyes on them.²³

23. *At- Tafsir al-'Uthmani*, with notes by Shaikh Mahmud ul-Hasan (Bijnor, 1950), p.458.

EXPERIMENTAL VERIFICATION

Of all the family problems in advanced countries, divorce tops the list. The fact that the majority of marriages in these countries end up in divorce has ruined family life completely, for children do not enjoy the love and care of parents who are still alive, whereas it was formerly only death which separated children from their parents. Children there grow up like uncared-for weeds, adding to the list of criminals. It is generally accepted that the majority of juvenile delinquents are the product of broken homes.

Divorce was not so common in former times. Then how has it reached such proportions now? The sole reason for this is traceable to the promiscuity of what in religious terminology is called unrestricted society. This life style devoid of moral constraints has made it possible for men and women to live together like the fish in the sea. With such a life style, permissiveness is unavoidable. One's loyalties keep changing. In a segregated society, where interaction between men and women is almost non-existent, a man associates only with his spouse, which keeps him from forming new loyalties, while in a free society he comes upon new faces every day, one better than the other. He then feels like abandoning the old face in preference to the new and more attractive one. What is happening in the West is that the couple live together for some time after marriage and when they come across a better

face, they go in for divorce to start a new life. This fact has been plainly stated by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Commenting on the increasing rate of divorce in western society, it says:

Actors, authors and other groups that have many contacts with the opposite sex tend to have a high divorce frequency.²⁴

24. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984), vol. 7, p.163.

This western report links the high rate of divorce to regular contacts. This is significant in that it proves that the degree of freedom of the sexes in society has a marked bearing on the instability of married life. Where segregation of the sexes in society creates stability in married life too much freedom creates the kind of instability in married life which ends in divorce.

Putting a stop to freedom in society could be an experimental verification of the restricted society being a proper society. Only the placing of restrictions in society can provide a deterrent to divorce. While the lack of restrictions in society weakens the fabric of family life and creates many social evils, constraints, on the other hand, strengthen family bonds, which greatly benefits the human race in different ways.